

Celebration strategies by OrangeLovePerson

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Summary: The day before the Snowball, Mike is wondering what to get El for Christmas.

Celebration strategies

(A.N.: Hi guys, I know it's June, but I really wanted to write a Christmas story. I hope you don't lose your Summer-y vibes because of this, ha ha. ^^

Bye!)

Celebration strategies

He was probably blowing things way out of proportion, he realised, but somewhere around lunchtime he truly couldn't help it any longer.

No, he really couldn't! It was one of those given implicitnesses caused by El's presence in his life:

When she'd smile at him, he'd smile back; when she looked close to tears, he'd feel his own eyes start to prick, too. When she'd wrap her hands around his neck, his own arms moved around her to pull her closer, almost on their own accord. Action, Reaction. And that's why it was so obvious to Mike that this whole thing here was consuming his thoughts for all the right reasons, it really *was* one of the most important things he'd ever have to figure out. Well, or at least it was important compared to some of the other things he'd recently considered to be important. Like homework, or his latest D&D campaign.

He didn't have a Christmas present for El yet.

It was already almost December, and Christmas was merely a couple weeks away. Which sounded like a lot but actually wasn't, come to think of it.

It was her first Christmas ever, probably, after all. And he didn't even know what to do for her yet.

Or maybe it was her second Christmas, depending on how accurate Hopper was at pulling the whole *festive mood*- thing off. Which Mike had some doubts about, but then again, he'd underestimated the chief

before already – in the good and in the bad way.

It didn't matter. Last year didn't matter. Because this year, El would experience the greatest, most exciting Christmas of all time, damn it.

But, yeah, he definitely needed to figure this entire gift-situation out, in order for such an amazing Christmas to happen...

Mike inwardly snorted. He could basically hear his Mum scold him for having those kind of super-materialistic thoughts: *"Michael Wheeler, is that all you can think about? Christmas is not just about presents! It's about family time! And being grateful, and...-"*

"Yes, Mum", thought-Mike replied, calmly, *"But I'm not even thinking about getting presents! I'm thinking about giving them to someone. That's allowed, right?"*

Thought-Mrs Wheeler took a moment to consider this. *"Hmm. Yes, you are right, sweetie. Although you might want to keep those thoughts for another time. Mr Clarke has looked in your direction at least three times already over the past minute!"*

With that, their imaginative chat was over, but it only took Mike about two minutes to lose his focus on the board once again.

El might not get permission to go to the Snowball with Mike, which had perhaps seemed like the biggest bummer in the entire universe at first, and like a pretty good reason to go try and beat Chief Hopper up, yet again. Mike had *promised* it to El, after all. A year ago. An entire year ago he'd said he'd go to the snowball with her! Did Hopper, - or that Doctor who seemed involved in some decisions, these days, - even remember how long a year felt for a kid their age?

His separation from El had been the darkest time in Mike's life.

Not just because he was rather young or because normal things seemed boring after you'd met someone with actual superpowers, but because his connection to her had been just as real as all those other incredible things they'd come across by now. Probably more so.

And now she was back, and yes, safety was important, but couldn't they have one night of fun together, after all they'd been through?

Well, at least Hopper had promised to *think* about letting El come to the Snowball. That was a start. Maybe El could really come and dance with Mike. It wouldn't even matter all that much if his Mum made him wear something really hideous, like that terrible suit last year for his great aunt's birthday. Or if everyone was staring at them, because, *really*, Mike couldn't dance *at all*.

Mike knew El wouldn't stare. Or maybe she would, but, well, rather in the sort of way that he *hoped* she would, like, because she found him so great in that moment, and then maybe they could...-

"Mike?" Mr Clarke repeated, his friendly expression giving way to slight concern at this lack of attention.

Usually, at least his four best (and, in all honesty, favourite) students were paying attention, but for the last few days, Mike had seemed rather distracted to Mr. Clarke. And Dustin Henderson's extracurricular questions seemed less related to their lessons than ever, too – Honestly, if Scott Clarke didn't know any better, he'd say Dustin was trying to clone some kind of mutated, cold-blooded animal, although that seemed too adventurous even for a boy like him. But that was besides the point right now.

"Hmm?", Mike uttered, still looking deep in thought, before he quickly shook his head and added: "I mean, I'm sorry Sir, what was the question?"

Mr. Clarke smiled. "I asked if you could be so nice to name the chemical symbol for tin, but Mr. Sinclair already told us what it is. Lucas, could you repeat it so Mike can add that on his sheet?"

"Sure, it's **Sn**.", Lucas replied, grinning smugly in Mike's direction. Mike only rolled his eyes slightly before writing the letters down.

"But maybe Mr. Wheeler can help us with the next one!", Mr Clarke continued, happily. Mike quickly looked at the following empty line on his sheet and the question next to it. He knew this!

"The chemical symbol for quicksilver is... **Hg**?"

"Correct!", Mr. Clarke beamed, looking like the next question was already forming on his tongue, when the school bell interrupted this educational bliss. "Oh, so late already! Time really flies by when it comes to the periodic table, doesn't it?"

A few people had left the classroom at this point, eager to reach their lunch, but some students remained, as always.

"What's up Mike? Already in holiday mode?", Mr. Clarke joked, but gave him an amused smile at the same time. These were good kids, he didn't want their scientific curiosity to stop any time soon, but he also didn't want to put too much pressure on anyone.

"Yeah... I guess that's it.", Mike replied, sheepishly, while he and his friends packed their bags.

Lucas snorted. "Yeah, right.", Mr. Clarke heard him mumble towards Maxine, "Rather in El-mode."

Mike glared at his friends, especially when Maxine let out a loud laugh. Even more mysterious than that, however, was the way Mike's head whipped around to Mr. Clarke a second later, an expression of something close to panic becoming visible. He raised a concerned eyebrow at this strange behaviour, but decided to better let the matter drop.

"Well, anyway, I hope we'll all see each other tomorrow evening for the big Snowball?"

"Mr. Clarke, you're coming, too?", Will asked, surprised.

"Oh, yes! I'm one of the chaperones for the Snowball. To make sure you kids all behave."

He winked at them. Then he said: "Oh, look! Another great word that could be abbreviated with the letters **S** and **n**. Snowball!" Mr. Clarke chuckled.

Why, oh why could such hilarious jokes never come to his mind in front of the other teachers?

"Pizza Thursday would be so much better if they stopped stuffing all that green stuff on top of the cheesy bits!", Max complained, once they all sat at their favourite table and were halfway through their food.

"Oh, come on, that's just rocket, or spinach or something!", Lucas told her, making an amused face.

"Yeah, you should have seen that asparagus-broccoli-pizza they once made us eat. That's a real problem, this is nothing!", Dustin added.

"Wait, when did this happen? When did you guys decide to team up with lunch lady Phyllis instead of supporting my case?", Max wanted to know in fake-concern.

Dustin shrugged. "I got my chocolate pudding on Monday. I'm not really angry at her this week."

"Also, you need your vitamins, Max.", Lucas quipped in, grinning. "Otherwise, your hair might change colour, and how would people with a helicopter be able to find you in a corn maze then, if they ever build one here?"

"Oh, that's easy. I've got these really weird looking stalkers, you know, so you just have to look for them and..-"

"You okay, Mike?", Will quietly asked Mike, while the others continued their banter. Will hadn't seen his friend so deep in thought in several weeks. He wasn't really concerned,- everyone could tell that Mike wasn't feeling miserable any longer, and that El's returning had sort of healed him, in a way. But Will still wanted to know what was going on.

"Oh, er, sure! I'm just thinking about... Christmas and all that, you know?"

"What about it? You mean the Snowball? Don't worry, Hopper will definitely come around, I think."

Mike smiled. "That's nice, Will. It's okay, though. If it doesn't work, I mean."

Will was surprised. He hadn't thought Mike would be so okay with it. "Really?"

"Yeah, I mean...", Mike glanced suspiciously over at the others, who were still laughing about something and messing around, "I thought, if El can't go to the Snowball, maybe we could bring the Snowball to her?"

Will smiled. "What did you have in mind?"

"Oh, it's just this thing Nancy said, a couple days ago... I don't know if she was serious about it or not... But, maybe we could have a party somewhere? You know, with decoration and Nancy's records, or maybe Jonathan's tapes, too, if he'd borrow them..."

Will nodded, excitedly.

"And we could dress up and pretend like it's an actual prom, you know? Just without the teachers and without jerks like Troy."

"And without girls to dance with.", Will reminded him, discretely pointing over at Dustin, who'd probably really like to actually dance with girls at their Snowball.

"Yeah, okay, but..."

Will tried really hard not to grin. He knew that Mike was probably on the verge of suggesting that everyone could dance with Max and El once in a while, if they'd be okay with it. But then again, Mike had probably planned to spend a rather large amount of their prom-party-thing with El, himself, considering that he'd sort of promised her that last year and was generally crazy about their amazing weirdo. But maybe, they'd find a solution for all of that when the time came.

"Look, it's just a Plan B, okay? Just in case the real Snowball doesn't work.", Mike shrugged.

"Okay.", Will agreed. "I like Plan B."

"And also, I'm thinking about what to get El for Christmas, you know? Because it's her first Christmas with us, and everything..." He eyed Will, curiously. "Hey, are you giving her one of your cards, by

the way?"

It had become one of the little traditions in their group to receive Christmas cards from Will every year, mostly because he was such an awesome artist and able to make these really funny, Christmassy "*Star Wars*" or "*Lord of the Rings*" cartoons.

And because Will had at one point started this gift-giving, Mike's, Lucas' and Dustin's Mums were now annually telling them to think of something small for their friends, too. It usually ended in the three giving less-creative, relatively standard Christmas cards to everyone in return, except for that one, really embarrassing time when Dustin's Mum had convinced him to give everyone glittery, perfumed candles.

Will nodded. "Yep. Do you want to see it?"

Mike's eyes went wide. "You're already done with it?"

"M-hm." Will opened the zipper of his back and rummaged around in it until he found what he'd been looking for. Mike saw that it was Will's version of their current English reading: "*The Crucible*". He also noticed that Will had stored a blue paper card between the pages 11 and 12.

As Will opened it, an impressive drawing was to be seen... In fact, the card had a sort of pop-up effect that made several elements stick out into the open, as soon as the card was unfolded.

Everyone was there: A tiny drawing of Dustin was feeding Dart in the corner, a tiny drawing of Max was driving a car, a tiny Will lay in his sick bed... Mike could see Nancy and Jonathan and himself and Lucas and...-

"But... Where is...-?"

"Turn the page.", Will told him, with a wide smile.

"There's another page?"

Indeed, there was. When Mike turned the next page, he saw a tiny Eleven, standing in front of a big, bright red spider-net-wall. Next to her, a tiny drawing of Hopper was looking around, holding a gun in

case any demodogs arrived.

At the bottom of the page, there was a small note:

"Dear El,

I'm really glad that you came back, so we could finally meet.

Merry Christmas!

Your friend,

Will"

Mike looked up at him.

"Will, this is really cool! It looks amazing!"

Will seemed a little sheepish, but also proud.

"Thanks! I had some more time than usual this year, with all the sick days this November..."

Mike shook his head. "She's going to love this! I wish I could come up with something that cool."

"You know, my Mum always says the best gifts are the ones you can't put a price tag on. Like, a compliment, or a photograph, or..."

"Do you think Jonathan would lend me his camera?", Mike asked, eagerly. Well, it made sense, come to think of it. Will had seen El's room, and there really weren't any pictures or posters anywhere, so she might like to have a photo of all her friends.

"Why don't you wait for tomorrow? Jonathan is taking the pictures for the Snowball, remember? We can ask him to take a really good one of us all, and you'll be the first to get it in a few days."

Mike looked pretty happy with this outcome. "Okay, that would be great!"

"What would be great?", Lucas quipped in, chewing on the crust of his pizza. Will looked at Mike, who just shrugged.

"Oh, we just thought it would be great if Jonathan takes a picture of us all tomorrow."

"What, while we're all wearing suits and stuff? I don't know...", Lucas replied, sceptical.

"Oh, hell yes, that's a plan!", Dustin grinned. "Guys, you won't believe what you'll get to see tomorrow night. I've got a good feeling about this!"

Lucas rolled his eyes, grinning.

"Do you know if El's coming yet?" Max wanted to know from Mike. He shook his head.

"Not sure yet. Let's hope she will."

Max smiled. "I bet she will. Wouldn't be much of a Christmas-party if there wasn't a bit of magic, right? And who's more magical than El?"

Mike and Will nodded, smiling warmly.

Yes, Mike thought to himself, *Who is?*